

STORIES

A heavy day. As if a tent was about to collapse. But it never did. There was always one more tent beyond the one about to collapse. That always produced a feeling of great calm. People had trained themselves not to look up, though of course they did, from time to time. That too produced a feeling of great calm. They had been taught since childhood about the tents beyond the tent they could see. There was nothing more to be said on the subject, though there were those who, when they looked up, thought. They thought doubts.

*

As a child, whenever it thundered, my grandmother would tell me it was the devil clomping about in his hobnail boots. Of course, I believed her. It still makes more sense, this eerie picture that cannot be pictured, this mind-filling scene too big for the mind. More sense than the rushing about of invisible air and the discharging of electrical currents. What are these? Hypotheses we do not experience but take on trust. Nothing enters the mind. Not like the devil, thumping about in his boots in another country above us. And beyond that?

*

Sometimes I have been tempted to believe those who had heard rumors they didn't exist. Why I didn't, in the end, was because I had heard another story.

FONS

There's a fountain under my window that doesn't tell the truth. This is the case with most fountains. They are, however, gentle liars.

What it tells are stories that have long been disproven or, worse, dead.

Rivers have long since ceased to tell stories of any kind. Even their laments have become complaints.

The seas still make efforts, aided by what the winds bring. But the winds have been tracked to their lairs and, like the Atlantic salmon who have finally been traced to their spawning grounds in cold Icelandic shelves, they

will never be the same. The encyclopedias become richer as seas and winds are forced to fabricate their existence. The song the Sirens sang has been recorded. It is nothing special.

As I look down through parted leaves I can see the water in the fountain, leaping up, curling the feathers in its tail like a tall white bird, falling back to gather and rise again.

The fountain under my window that doesn't tell the truth wakes me each morning and lulls me to sleep at night. I see it first and last thing when I draw the curtains or part the blinds. It is with me all day and a good part of the night. A small fountain, a clever lying little fountain. O fons Bandusiae

FRYING TIME

He went into the Fish & Chip shop. England. Things had changed from what he remembered as a child. Still, there was that old reliable, fish and chips. He had waited outside the shop till it opened, and he was first in. Huge vats of boiling fat were bubbling, and in them, the wire-net baskets full of frying potatoes. But he could see no fish in the fat, and none draining through the holes in the metal shelf at the back, being kept hot. The man in charge bent down beneath the counter and pulled on what seemed to be an old carpet. He heaved the beast head first into the fat. The body trailed over the edge, but the head began to sizzle. Hairs came out of the muzzle and floated, frying to a crisp. Bubbles encased teeth and gums.

"Excuse me," he asked the man, "but do you have any fish? Cod? Plaice?"

"Fish?" said the man, cutting a flank steak. "Fish? No fish tonight, mate. Not that much around any more. It's ass tonight. Fish tomorrow, maybe. Ass and chips. Want a nice piece of ass with your chips, then?"

-- Brian Swann

New York, NY